1. The overall expectation of the education system never really changed throughout my school career. The basic expectation was that the students would be attentive and hardworking, and in return the teachers would pass along essential knowledge that would be necessary once the students left school. The arrangement of the education system is, at its core, a social contract between the students and teachers. In this social contract the student relinquishes the perfect freedom that they would experience outside of the classroom and in return they gain necessary skills and knowledge. In this way schools are Locke’s republic in microcosm.

2. My parents accepted nothing less than success throughout my school career. Not only were my parents insistent on enforcing good study habits at home they routinely exhorted me to do well in school, particularly on texts and exams. Passing exams was quintessential to succeeding in schools and to fail was inevitably due to a sloppy thought process and a lack of preparation. I was trusted to make my own decisions regarding my academic life, but I would face the consequences of those decisions as well.

3. My impression of the business world, while I was in school, was that good grades were essential to any future I would have. Success in school would get my foot in the door of a career and from there I would have to prove myself with the same work ethic and attention to detail that had characterized my school career. The assumption of the business world is that the education system will produce employees who are economically valuable, possessing skills that will make them assets in their future careers. Lamentably, this is rarely the case, most students exit high school with a degree made nearly worthless through market saturation and possessing nearly no real world skills. My high school combated this effect, as well as the attrition of students who preferred skilled jobs to academics, by implementing a rigorous, and somewhat prestigious vocational program. The lack of widespread support for vocational programs in schools, programs that could potentially offer accreditation as well as keep students in school long enough to teach them a little more of the academic knowledge, is a shame.

4. My expectations for my own education were that it would prepare me for the world beyond the classroom, I had hoped that the knowledge that I gained in my school years would be broadly applicable to the broader society. I find more and more that my high school education was insufficient. Approaching the matter from my own content area, social studies, I was in college before I read any work by John Locke, before I even heard about the English Bill of Rights. These are glaring holes in the education of anyone studying American history, furthermore the teaching of social studies is primarily concerned with ephemera. The recitation of trivia is vastly less important than the broader concepts at play throughout history. It is my guess that not a single high school student, could explain the dichotomy of Aristotelianism and Platonism and how the two philosophies effect our world today.

5. Most teaching strategies were some variation of read-and-report, wherein the students reads a textbook, article or accompanying text and finishes some sort of worksheet in order to prove that they did the reading. The more interesting teachers, in my view at least, engaged the class in spirited debates and discussions about the ramifications of what we had read. However, these were mostly higher level classes and occurred within the last few years of high school. I would be remiss if I did not mention a teacher that I had throughout my high school career, she taught Spanish and her approach to the language was simple and effective, for the first two years you studied vocabulary, rigorously and by rote, by year three those who were taking the class to fulfill a college entry requirement had left and only the dedicated remained, and those that remained had a solid foundation in the language. The upper level classes of the last two years were much more relaxed and dedicated to enhancing the students’ ability to speak the language. After four years with that teacher I was able to skip the first three Spanish courses offered here at UMF and even in the class I was in, my highly technical grasp of the language served me quite well.

6. I am well suited for book learning, as I think are most people who go on to be teachers. The classroom environment of studious contemplation works quite well for me personally, and I am enthusiastic about discussing and debating new ideas and concepts with other people. However, I do find certain subject matters quite boring, particularly anything involving a large number of names and dates. I personally find large abstract concepts easier to work with than raw data.

7. The school system that I went through consisted of three distinct socioeconomic levels. My elementary school was a fairly new school, in an upper-middle class town, rural but respectable. The middle school that I went to consolidated two elementary schools, mine and a smaller one form a poorer town. The middle school was old, fairly dilapidated and the teachers were some of if not the worst paid in the state. When I went to high school, my middle school consolidated with a town that was wealthier than my home town and had its own self-contained school district. While these measurements of socioeconomic level between the various schools I attended may seem distinct, in reality these measurements are all relative and there wasn’t much difference between any of us when you got down to brass tacks.

8. There wasn’t much choice as to what classes we could take although that may have been just me, I qualified for and took honors and A.P. classes all throughout high school, which resulted in a full and relatively demanding schedule. The school day itself was typical of the Prussian style model school, two periods of work, then a break, two periods of work, then lunch, repeat ad nauseam. This model is nothing if not efficient, and while there have been criticisms levied against the model I defy any of the detractors to organize hundreds of kids in a more punctual manner.

9. I took mostly honors and A.P. classes, and while they were decent I do believe that they could have been more rigorous. I have written about this at greater length earlier in this document and would direct further enquiries there.

10. My background is relevant in that I occasionally set my sights too high for my students. I have great confidence in my students’ ability to understand whatever is shown to them and therefore my lesson plans are a little ambitious. I liked being challenged and I have a particular passion for the social sciences, therefore I assume that my students share my enthusiasm. Many students can be infected by a general attitude of enthusiasm; I just need to remember to allow students enough time to actually learn the material.

11. Teaching is all that I ever wanted to do. I enjoy learning new things and I enjoy showing others how to do things, as well as explaining and discussing new concepts. Additionally, I like working with students, it is something I actually enjoy. Seeing students overcome difficulties and really succeed in the classroom is a task that I want to take on.

12. One of the greatest things that a teacher can do for a student is help that student succeed in spite of themselves. Many of the most challenging teachers are almost universally dislike by the students they have yet they wind up being the most influential and effective teachers. I aspire to be someone who pushes students to the fullest of their potential because it’s best for them, even if that means that the students don’t particularly like me.

13. I hope to help students reach their fullest potential. I hope to make a real contribution to future generations by ensuring that the present generations are well educated and informed.

14. Like any academic discipline teaching is in a constant state of flux as various ideological factions continuously debate over the best practice to use in the classroom, I couldn’t care less about any of that. I want to teach students, I want to work in the classroom with my pupils, let the politicians and researchers say what they want, I will do what think is best for the students in my care.

15. I disagree with much of the current educational theory in place. Particularly elements of the latest educational theory, that discourages competition within the classroom, I think that is shortsighted, eminently foolish and doomed to failure. There are a variety of tools in an educator’s repertoire, why deprive them of such an effective one? While a competitive learning model is not a good fit for all students neither is a cooperative learning model, I would argue for moderation in educational pedagogy, which, I fear is becoming increasingly factional.